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ENDS AND MEANS--DEVELOPING SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES FOR READING INSTRUCTION.

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SINCE READING INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES HELP DETERMINE THE FUTURE OF LEARNERS, THESE OBJECTIVES SHOULD BE FORMULATED CAREFULLY. WHILE SOCIETY'S DEMANDS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING OBJECTIVES, THEIR SELECTION DEPENDS ON THE TEACHING STAFF'S CONVICTIONS AND PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION. WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT THE LEARNING PROCESS AND ABOUT THE LEARNER, HOWEVER, MUST BE CONSIDERED. CURRICULUM EXPERTS RECOMMEND USING SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES TO CLARIFY AND ILLUSTRATE LARGER OBJECTIVES. IF GENERAL OBJECTIVES ARE USED, LEVELS OF GENERALIZATION MUST BE DEFINED AND VERIFIED EXPERIMENTALLY. OBJECTIVES SHOULD BE IN BEHAVIORAL TERMS, PLACED IN HIERARCHIAL ORDER ACCORDING TO THEORIES OF DEVELOPMENT AND MATURATION, AND COMPARED WITH AND CLASSIFIED ACCORDING TO DEVELOPED SYSTEMS OF DEFINING GOALS IN BEHAVIORAL TERMS. TEACHERS SHOULD GIVE LEARNERS THE CHANCE TO TRY WHAT IS ASKED OF THEM. THESE TASKS MUST BE GRATIFYING ENOUGH TO STIMULATE THEM TO TRY NEW WAYS OF ACHIEVING THE SAME GOALS. WHILE READING INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES DEFINE AND DIRECT LEARNING, THE READING PROGRAM SHOULD BE FLEXIBLE ENOUGH TO ALLOW FOR INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE (SEATTLE, MAY 4-6, 1967). (NS)

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"ENDS AND MEANS: DEVELOPING SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES FOR READING INSTRUCTION"

(SYMPOSIA VII: Designing a Reading Curriculum)

T. H. Huxley once remarked that the great end of life was not knowledge but action. This is only partly true, for action, to be purposeful, must be directed by knowledge. The two, knowledge and action, cannot be separated so easily, even if the match at times becomes awkward. This balance between knowledge and action is a major concern for educators who must constantly keep the balance mechanism adjusted to the social and philosophical changes that influence education in every period. If, in the coming years, educational technology holds our fancy, as it seems likely to--given our lust for specialization and our preoccupation with measurement--specific behavioral objectives

in education will increasingly shape society's larger goals as they are interpreted by the schools.

Because the objectives of reading instruction will play so large a part in determining both the academic and human possibilities of the children we teach, formulating these objectives demands careful and sensitive thinking from us. Objectives commonly serve four functions: (a) they define and give direction to learning; (b) they provide a mechanism for selecting content and experiences for the curriculum; (c) they focus on the kinds of learnings which will receive emphasis; and (d) they detail specifications for evaluation. (10).

There is almost universal agreement that society's needs and demands are the primary sources of educational goals, but at this point universal agreement ends. For the development of objectives is a matter of choice on the part of a teaching staff, based on deep convictions arising out of previous experience and an interpretation of society's ideals, methods of thinking, attitudes, and current needs. (1). Final selection of objectives ultimately depends upon a faculty's convictions, its philosophy of education.

Learning and Learners

What is known about learning and learners, as well as the nature of content and its contribution to the education of an individual, will determine, in part, the selection of objectives, but even more, will order, relate, and give dimension to objectives. (1). Most educators consider what we know about learning to be crucial in the selection of objectives. So much so, in fact, that current methods of teaching reading retain vestiges of nearly every learning theory which historically has achieved some prominence. The psychology of learning, in one guise or another, forms the basis for most instruction in reading--regardless of the currency or established proof of the theory.

Taba makes this observation:

> "The study of the psychological principles underlying curriculum and teaching is somewhat akin to an archeological expedition: one can find the fossilized remains of almost any learning theory that ever existed, no matter how outdated or how discredited it may be." (14).

The warning here is clear. Before objectives are selected for reading instruction, their theoretical antecedents should be examined carefully, for, quite possibly, the theories underlying these objectives may be little more than historical curiosities.

Briefly, is there a precise, consistent, unified theory of learning upon which the formulation of objectives in reading can be based? While many advances have been made over the past few years leading to a greater understanding of the learning processes, the answer to this question remains a still rather unsatisfactory, no. If this is the case, of what practical value are theories of learning to instruction in general and reading in particular? Cantor, writing on the contemporary status of research in learning, skeptically concludes:

> "In this writer's opinion, an honest appraisal of basic psychological research on learning indicates that, at the present time, such research activity produces little of significance for educational practice." (2).

Mowrer, in this connection, advised students of learning theory that they would do better in practical fields to make use of "enlightened and informed common sense." On the other hand, Hilgard does not regard differences among theorists as particularly vexing. Instead, he suggests that on many important points crucial to educators, most theorists are in substantial agreement. Theorists may differ with regard to interpretation, but they agree in principle on most matters. Havighurst, too, believes that sufficient "ground work" has emerged

from research of the past few decades to enable educators to relate "intellectual development" to practical instruction. (5).

Because of the intramural conflict between learning theorists, a tendency arises among those who are responsible for developing programs of reading instruction to ignore research findings in the psychology of learning. This is, likewise, an extreme view. No unified theory of learning is likely to emerge from basic research for years to come, but where current theory is incorporated into curriculum planning, where the best evidence available is considered, where objectives consonant with theory are subjected to a rigorous tryout before their acceptance, the selection of objectives using learning theory as one of the bases seems to me to be sound.

Attempts to develop suitable objectives for instruction must be based on selection criteria which include, in addition to what we know about learning, what we know about the learner. In particular, objectives must be based on what is both logical and appropriate to the growth potential of a given level of maturity: specific objectives are developmental statements of general objectives. They reflect basic needs at various developmental levels, mirroring the physical, social, and emotional concomitants of these needs. Then, to be attainable, objectives must also be statements of behavior which students at a given level of development can achieve.

Objectives--General or Specific?

Both curriculum experts and specialists in educational measurement generally recommend that specific instructional goals be defined in behavioral terms. But this advice conceals a major problem. It is all but impossible,

nor is it advisable, to specify fully and exactly all of the behaviors that might apply to a skill or concept. Ebel makes this observation:

> "Behavioral definitions tend to be books, not paragraphs, sections, or even chapters....The virtue of concreteness involves the burden of complexity. Abstractions for all their faults do have the virtue of simplicity. The virtue of definiteness involves a danger of over-emphasis on conformity." (3).

The level of generality appropriate for an objective is one of the most troublesome questions facing educators today. Fifteen years ago, it was popular, and still is if my topic today is any reflection of current thinking, to draw a contrast between highly specific objectives and those whose reference is a more generalized mode of behavior. Tyler suggests that it may be more useful to think of defined levels of generalization, verified experimentally, and aimed "at as high a level of generalization as experiments show to be successful." The purpose would be to help students use generalized modes of behavior as these modes are reflected in the ability to cope with specifics. An objective might then be "stated in the curriculum plan with specifics used as <u>illustrations</u> (Italics mine), rather than treating the specifics as ends in themselves." (15).

This suggests that the goals of reading should be concerned with processes as well as products, with perspective as well as pertinence, and simplicity as well as specificity. Most important in relation to Tyler's suggestions, reading instruction needs to focus on adaptability, not merely an adaptation.

Where specific behaviors are used to illustrate objectives, their function is largely one of clarifying the verbal meaning of a larger outcome. There have been at least three productive attempts to define educational goals in

behavioral terms, one at the elementary level (7), one at the secondary level (h), and one most appropriate at the college level. (1). These classification systems may be of great value to those responsible for the development of reading instruction in helping them to define substantive content, to specify objectives, and to plan learning activities for specific units of work. Referring to Bloom's Taxonomy, to which he was a contributor, Krathwohl (8) sees the Taxonomy as a concise model for the selection, analysis, and refinement of objectives. Further, it provides a system by which objectives can be compared both with learning content and the means used to measure the mastery of that content.

Though a possible "hierarchy of learning experiences" from the lower to the upper levels of the Taxonomy is suggested, only general support has been demonstrated in research for this hypothesis, but in no instance has the hierarchical structure of the Taxonomy been supported by various factor matrices. (12) (13). If this or similar classification systems suggest a readiness relationship between objectives lower in the hierarchy and those higher, then these systems can hardly be ignored in framing objectives for reading instruction.

Behavioral Illustrations in Reading

There are a variety of listings in the literature of reading which catalogue and classify the outcomes of reading instruction. In most of these lists, little or no attempt has been made to distinguish between general and specific goals, between content and behavior, or between the lower and the higher order objectives.

French provides many excellent examples of these distinctions, and illustrates general objectives with specific behaviors. One such example states the general objective and illustrates behaviors as follows:

1. Commands and uses the basic skills of reading for information, ideas, opinions, stimulation, and leisure.

   Illustrative Behaviors

   a. Adjusts his reading rate and his method of reading (skimming, taking notes for detail or for enjoyment only) to the material at hand.

   b. Seeks consciously to attain his best reading rate and comprehension.

   c. Reads with increasing speed, comprehension, and appreciation.

   d. (Other illustrative behaviors are included). (4).

At the primary level, as one of the goals of modern reading instruction, David Russell states that teachers should provide "for the gradual increase in skills and acquisition of valuable habits in silent and oral reading." (11).

This objective may be illustrated behaviorally as follows:

1. Reading

   a. He does assigned reading by himself.

   b. Anticipates the story from its title, picks out chief sentences, and is able to tell what each says.

   c. Reads to find answers--what, when, where, and why.

   d. Distinguishes the chief elements in a story and can repeat them.

2. Word Recognition

   a. Recognizes and produces the individual letter signs for consonants and consonant blends.

   b. Can fuse two-or-three-letter sounds into a single word and can recognize letters by their sound.

   c. Uses context to pronounce and locate meanings for words.

After developing specific illustrations for set objectives, the next logical step would involve placing these objectives in some hierarchy consonant with what is known of development and maturation. If the objectives selected are

consistent and noncontradictory, they can then be compared with and classified according to one of the previously mentioned systems.

A Concept of the Learner

Systems, however, can only aid in the formulation of objectives. They cannot insure what will happen when objectives come face to face with a learner. Tyler, speculating on the changes that have occurred in his thinking over the past two decades, notes that beyond the planning of objectives, students must have the chance to do what is implied in the objective, that what they do must be satisfying to them, and that what they have done must become an impelling force stimulating them to try new ways to reach the same objectives. (15). He urges that the learnings be sequential and that each learner set standards that compel him to go beyond his past performance. Finally, if learning is to continue beyond the teacher's "poor power to add or detract," the individual must have some means of judging his own output.

No recognition, no concept, no insight is more meaningful than the realization that in education we must deal with a live, squirming, purposeful human being in whom go our hopes for critical judgment, our needs for creative innovation, and our freedom to change as the world changes. And humans exert a powerful influence on one another, regardless of their age. When we plan and develop programs of reading instruction, children and young people must be the constant focus of our attention.

If our attention is fixed on curriculum, on technology, and on reaching specific goals at every turn, students who vary from our conception of them, yet are expected to conform to a pattern of objectives, will find themselves

lodged on one of Procrustes' infamous beds. And if you recall, Procrustes had a marvelous way of fitting a traveler to his bed. If the traveler was unfortunate enough to have his legs extend beyond the footboard, Procrustes and his man cut them off to make the sleeper fit the bed. If, on the other hand, he was too short, ropes were tied to his head and feet and Procrustes conveniently stretched him until he reached the proper length. When we adjust students to programs rather than programs to students, when the curriculum in reading becomes a rigid lockstep sequence of goals, what happens to the child is analogous to what happened to Procrustes' travelers. We all need to remember that what happens to the child in schools is the final criterion for judging what we've practiced there. Children learn, not an objective, but what they do in response to one.

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